

The Duty of a Minister :

A

S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT

THE VISITATION,

HELD AT

THE PARISH-CHURCH,

I N

L E E D S,

JUNE 24, 1784.

By the Rev. MILES ATKINSON, B. A.

L E E D S :

PRINTED FOR J. BINNS; AND SOLD ALSO BY J. WALLIS,
LONDON; J. AND J. MERRILS, CAMBRIDGE, &c. &c.

PRICE SIX-PENCE.

The Days of a Month:

S. A. R. M. O. N.

THE ALLEGORY

OF THE

I COR. xii. 28.

AND GOD HATH SET SOME IN THE
CHURCH, FIRST APOSTLES, SECOND-
ARILY PROPHETS, THIRDLY TEACHERS.

WE read in the Sacred Pages, that God made Man *in his own Image*, placed him a little lower than the Angels, and crowned him with Honour and Glory. We are also informed, that this Image consisted in Goodness and Knowledge, Gen. i. 31. Col. iii. 10. But Man was soon tempted to sin against Heaven, and by this, his Understanding became darkened, and his Heart was turned away from God. Ephes. iv. 18.

The Condition of the Human Race moved the Pity of the Almighty. Angels had sinned

before, but Angels were given up to the Misery which their impious Folly deserved. They were never indulged with any Prospect of Deliverance. No Intercessor stood up to plead, and consequently they were left to Punishment without Mercy, *reserved in everlasting Chains under Darknes unto the Judgment of the Great Day.* Jude 6. The Case was otherwise with the fallen Race of Man. Their Heavenly Father was pleased to look at them, as Objects of his Compassion, and in his first passing of Judgment remembered Mercy. The Promise of a Saviour immediately followed the Fall: and even accompanied the Sentence of Condemnation, when the Almighty said to the Serpent,—*And I will put Enmity between thee and the Woman, and between thy Seed and her Seed: It shall bruise thy Head, and thou shalt bruise his Heel.* Gen. iii. 15.

In Consequence of this Promise the Gospel hath been preached from that Hour to this, and as we read in Heb. xi. the Saints in all the different Ages of the World have constantly been accepted through Faith in the Son of God. Noah was *a Preacher of Righteousness*; and to our Lord Jesus Christ *give all the Prophets witness, that through his Name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive Remission of Sins.* Acts x. 43. God spake at sundry Times and in divers Manners,
in

in the former Ages of the World, *to our Fathers by the Prophets, and in these last Days he hath spoken to us by his Son.*

The Form of the Commission given to the Prophets we have in Ezek. xxxiii. *So thou, O Son of Man, I have set thee a Watchman unto the House of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the Word at my Mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked Man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the Wicked from his Way, that wicked Man shall die in his Iniquity, but his Blood will I require at thy Hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the Wicked of his Way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his Way, he shall die in his Iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy Soul.* And the Form, which the Son of God delivered to his Apostles, and by them to all the Ministers of God to this Day, we have in the New Testament, Mark xvi. *Go ye into all the World, and preach the Gospel to every Creature; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*

From the Dignity of their Office, and the great Importance of the Truths, which they have to deliver, the Ministers of the Gospel are dignified with the most honourable Names, each conveying some Idea of what they are to dif-

discharge. They are called *Ambassadors of Christ, and Servants of the Most High God, who shew unto the People the Way of Salvation:—Stewards of the Mysteries of God:—Shepherds and Overseers to the Flock of Christ:—Pastors and Teachers:—*Their Office, in it's general Import, may be considered as consisting of two Parts: the one is, to point out to Sinners Jesus Christ the Way to Heaven, and prevail with them to take it by Repentance and Faith, called in Scripture, *converting a Sinner from the Error of his Way*, James v. 20. The other, to strengthen or establish those who are converted, that they may not draw back again to Perdition, but press on to the saving of the Soul; called in Scripture, *confirming the Disciples, or building up, or feeding the Church of God*. Acts xv. 16. 20.

The Ministers of God are to fulfil their Commission by the Power of Precept and Example, *i. e.* by preaching the Gospel, or speaking *the Truth as it is in Jesus*; and by seconding their Doctrine by their exemplary Lives, or *walking as they have Christ for their Example*.

They should, in the first Place, be careful to speak the Truth, not forgetting, that they are to declare the whole Counsel of God. Acts xx. 27. With Pain we read both in the
Old

Old and New Testament, that Teachers have been often unfaithful to their Trust. Of all the Prophets of Israel, called to speak to Ahab upon a very particular Occasion, one only declared the Will of the Lord. God frequently speaks by Ifaiah and Jeremiah, in Words like to these: *Woe to the false Prophets, who ask Counsel, but not of me.* And our Redeemer as frequently denounces Woes against the Jewish Teachers, as *blind Guides.*

From the Nature of the Gospel we are led to the Topics which it's Preachers should continually enforce: Such as the Fall of Man: his moral Depravity: the Necessity of Conversion: the Sacrifice and Intercession of our Redeemer Jesus Christ: the Willingness of God to forgive and receive to Favour all that humble themselves for Sin, lament and forsake their Iniquities: implore his Forgiveness for the Sake of Jesus Christ: give to him their Hearts, and walk before him in Righteousness and true Holiness to the End of Life: the eternal Happiness of those, who thus believe and are converted, and the everlasting Misery and Torment, which must be the inevitable Portion of all that *will not come to Christ that they may have Life.*

To

To insist continually upon these Topics, is called in Scripture, Preaching Christ, because they are all connected with that Sacrifice and Obedience, which he rendered to the Father for the Redemption and Salvation of Sinners. Every Sinner, and who is *there that liveth and sinneth not* ? is condemned by the Law of God to suffer eternal Death. Who then shall deliver us all ? No one can be found sufficient for this, but the Lord Jesus Christ. We have no Access to God the Father, but by his Son ; no Remission of Sins but through his Blood ; and, morally speaking, without the Assistance of his Spirit, Sinners are unable to perform the Terms of Repentance and Faith, on which these Blessings of Remission and Acceptance are conferred. This Information he giveth us from his own Mouth :—*No Man cometh to the Father but by me.* And again, *Without me ye can do Nothing.* Surely, if the Son be slighted, Nothing can be hoped for from the Father. Common Sense must inform us, that if the Almighty, of his Sovereign Grace and Goodness, hath provided the Sacrifice of his own Son, as the only Mean of Forgiveness and Reconciliation, he never can bless the Labours of the Preacher, when this Way of Deliverance is not pointed out : Or, in other Words, when *Christ is not preached.*

preached. But, if God does not crown our Labours with Success, our Preaching must be in vain. *Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God only giveth the Increase.*

To confirm these Observations by our own Experience, let each consider the Fruit of his Ministry, and enquire what good he hath done in turning Sinners from the Error of their Ways. If we have not preached Christ, I am persuaded we have done little Good in the World. We may have talked indeed of the Loveliness and Propriety of Virtue, and the moral Fitness of Things; but what was this more than to talk? Could we adorn our Composition with every human Embellishment, we should please the Ear, but the Heart would continue unchanged: *the unjust would be unjust still, and the filthy would be filthy still.* Let the Gospel be preached, and the Effects are widely different. The Heart is now melted, and the Cheek is no longer dry. Sin is then seen in its real Deformity, God becomes the Object of Desire, and Holiness appears delightful. The cruel Extortioner relents, and the shameless Harlot blushes. Zaccheus restoreth Four-fold, and Magdalen falls at her Lord's Feet, *washing them with her Tears, and wiping them with the Hairs of her Head.* The Chains of Sin are now unloosed, and the Prison

Door flies open : The wandering Sheep is brought back to the Fold, and the Father of the Prodigal, with open Arms, receives his returning Son : Mourning Sinners receive Forgiveness, and are no longer *Strangers* to the Joys of the Gospel, nor *Foreigners* from the Kingdom of Christ, but *Fellow Citizens with the Saints, and of the Household of God.* Ephes. ii. 19.

But let us again remark, that the most faithful Preaching will have little Effect, if it is not seconded by a Life corresponding with it. We cannot be ignorant of the Backwardness in the human Mind to receive Reproof, even from a Friend, how much rather from one, who hath excited in us a Prejudice against the Truth ?

Our natural Love of Sin, and undue Attachment to the World, render us unwilling to regard the Gospel, which calls us to forsake our sinful Pleasures, mortify our Lusts, overcome our foolish Fondness for the World, and live a holy and virtuous Life, even when it's Truths are delivered by a Minister, blameless in his Conduct, and pure in his Conversation. The heavenly Preachers under both Dispensations, however distinguished for Zeal and Piety, complain, *Who hath believed our Report ?* How much rather will Sinners be glad to plead the bad Example

ample of their Ministers in excuse for themselves! How will such Remarks as these stifle Conviction, and still the Clamours of Conscience: You see, he does not believe a Word of what he says, for, after every Sermon which he preaches, God may say to him, as the King said to the unprofitable Servant, *out of thine own Mouth will I condemn thee?*

From what hath been said, we may observe in the first Place, what need we, Ministers of the Gospel, have to examine ourselves, whether we faithfully discharge our Office in the Ways already mentioned—And we are led in the Second Place to consider the fatal Consequences to ourselves and others, which must attend an unfaithful Discharge of this sacred and important Function, and the happy Effects to both of a faithful Discharge of it.—Let us first make the Appeal to our own Hearts, and see if we shall be found faithful before God.—And here let us attend to the Motives which we have in preaching; and to the Subjects on which we preach—Do we preach for filthy Lucre, or to gain Applause? Do we in any Sense preach Ourselves, and not Jesus Christ our Lord? Do we feel no anxious Concern for the Glory of God; no tender Solitude for the Salvation of our People? When we seek Preferment, are our first Enquiries, or

is

is it our first Concern to know, if the Living we wish to gain be worth so much? or if the Duty is very little? or if the Village is in a Sporting Country? What an Idea must such Enquiries give every sensible Man of our Qualifications for the Ministerial Office? And how far must such Ministers be from the Spirit of the first Preachers of the Gospel, who in seeking Preferment sought *a good Office*?

If we have Reason to think our Motive right, let us in the next Place enquire what we preach. Are our Sermons such as might have been expected from Heathen Darknes, or from Men enlightened by the Sunshine of the Gospel? Such as we may have learned from a Socrates, or a Cicero, or such as were taught by our Lord Jesus Christ and his Apostles, Peter and John, James and Paul? Do we consider our Congregations as Assemblies of true Christians, merely because they are Members of the outward and visible Church of Christ? Then, what meant St. Paul in Rom. ii. when he said: *He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that Circumcision which is outward in the Flesh; but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and Circumcision is that of the Heart, in the Spirit, and not in the Letter, whose Praise is not of Men, but of God?* And again, Gal. vi. 15. *For in Christ Jesus,*
neither

neither Circumcision availeth any Thing, nor Uncircumcision, but a New Creature? Do we teach the People, that if they will do this or that Duty, or if they be, according to an improper Manner of speaking, good moral Men, they are in the Way to Heaven, instead of pointing out the Renewed Mind and the New Creature as Evidences of Faith, or our best Righteousness as accepted only for the Sake of the Lord Jesus Christ? Then what does the Apostle mean by saying; that we are justified by Faith without the Deeds of the Law; and that the Jews, being ignorant of God's Righteousness, or Way of justifying Sinners, and going about to establish their own Righteousness, had not submitted to the Righteousness of God. Or what, I pray you, did the inspired Teachers intend by such Expressions as these: We preach Christ—And if any Man preach any other Gospel, or lay any other Foundation than that which is laid, Christ Jesus, let him be accursed?

If we are so far acquitted by our own Consciences, and the Bible, let us next examine our Conduct:

Are we industrious, zealous and unwearied in our respective Departments? Do we, as Health and Opportunity will admit, labour, both in public and in private, to win our People to
Righte-

Righteousness? Do we, if our Parishes will allow of it, visit them from House to House, that we may carry our Message to every Ear, and free ourselves from the Blood of all? Perhaps our own Heart may be backward to this Work; and others, who are indifferent in themselves to true Religion, may speak of this as too much. But neither the Bible, nor our Church, agrees with such Men. In Acts xx. St. Paul appeals to the Ephesians, *if he had not both taught them publickly, and from House to House; yea, if for the Space of Three Years, during his Stay amongst them, he had ceased to warn every one of them Night and Day with Tears.* And the Bishop, by the Appointment of the Church, when he admitted us to the Office of Ministers, solemnly charged us—*to teach and to premonish; to feed and to provide for the Lord's Family; to seek after Christ's Sheep, which are dispersed abroad; and never to cease our Labours, until we had brought those committed to our Charge to that Agreement in the Faith and Knowledge of God, and that Ripeness and Perfection of Age in Christ, that there should be no Place left among us, either for Error in Religion, or Viciousness of Life.*

Our last Enquiry respecting this Part of our Subject should be, if this faithful Preaching of Christ, and this Labour and Diligence in
the

the Work of the Ministry, have been accompanied with Purity of Conversation, and Integrity of Conduct: If we have walked as we have Christ for an Example—For if either we shew a careless Unconcern about the Souls of our People, or in our Conversation, Behaviour, Entertainments, or Company are little different from the Rest of the World, how can we suppose that we answer to the Character of Saints, and especially of the holy Ministers of Jesus Christ, who are required to be even an Example to Saints themselves, an *Example to Believers in Word or Teaching, in Conversation, in Charity, in Spirit, in Faith, in Purity?* 1 Tim. iv. 12. If, for Instance, our Hearts are evidently placed upon the World, and the Things of the World, with what Honesty can we insist of Heavenly Mindedness in our Hearers, and call upon them, at the Peril of their Souls, *to set their Affections on Things above, where Christ sitteth at the Right Hand of God?* Or, if our Minds are earthly and sensual, how can we say to those that hear us,—*the Carnal Mind is Enmity against God; and, if we live after the Flesh, we shall die?* Rom. viii. 13. If we shew nothing of the Spirit of Christ in ourselves, and pay no Regard to the spiritual State of our People, further than to run over a Course of Duty on Sunday, without any Feeling in our own Hearts, or any Concern
for

for their Conversion; or Edification, how can we say unto them,—*to be spiritually minded is Life and Peace*, Rom. viii. 6. or, *that God is our Record, how greatly we long after them all in the Bowels of Jesus Christ?* Philip. i. 8.

Much less, if our Conversation is loose, prophane, or, at best, full of trifling and foolish Jestings, can we say, *our Conversation is in Heaven*. Or, with any Appearance of Honesty, admonish our People—to *let their Speech be alway with Grace*, and, *to walk as they have us for an Example*. Philip. iii. 17. Or, if we chuse for our Companions Men of Pleasure, or such as swear, defraud, are drunken, or debauched, or frequent Places of Entertainment, at which God's Laws are shamefully broken, how can we pretend, that we have the Mind of Christ, or put on an hypocritical Face, and require, in the Language of Scripture, that our People come out and separate themselves from Unbelievers, because there can be no Fellowship, no Concord, no Agreement between such and the Servants of Christ; or tell them, that if thus they forsake the Company and Conversation of the Ungodly, *God will be a Father unto them, and they will be the Sons and Daughters of the Lord Almighty?* 2 Cor. vi.

Lastly, if we ourselves are living in any presumptuous

sumptuous Sin, if we are guilty of Swearing, Drunkenness, Fornication, Oppression, or any other grievous Transgression, with what Face can we read the Commandments to Others; declare—*That he who committeth Sin is of the Devil*; or say—*That they who do such Things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God?* Gal. v. 21. In short, if we are not truly serious and devout, holy and heavenly minded; if we are not an Example to Others in the Purity of our Conversation and the Integrity of our Lives; how can we call upon our People *to be Followers of us, as we are Followers of Christ*; or, *seriously declare unto them, that without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord?* Heb. xii. 14.

From all which we perceive, that the Ministers of the Gospel will be of little Service in the World, if their Preaching be not right, and of still less, if their Conduct also be wrong.

I beg your Patience a little longer, Brethren, till we consider, on the contrary, the fatal Consequences that must arise to ourselves, and our People, if we are unfaithful to our Trust; and the happy Effects to both, which must flow from a faithful Discharge of it.—And First, We declared at our Ordination, that, we trusted we were called to the Office of the Ministry by the

C

Spirit

Spirit of God. But if we have been unfaithful from the first, this was evidently false. I need not mention the Guilt of this, since the awful Fate, which attended Annanias and Sapphira, who were struck dead by the immediate Hand of God, declares it unto us; for we, like them, *lied not unto Men only, but unto God.* Besides; what Hypocrites and Dissemblers must we be, how carnally minded, and how covetous, for the Sake of filthy Lucre, to declare continually the most awful Things to others, which we believe not ourselves? I pray you, Brethren, reflect for a Moment, what Character does that Man deserve, who, declaring himself to be a Minister of God, continually alarms his Fellow-Creatures with Threatenings of the most exquisite and eternal Punishment, or flatters them with the Promises of eternal Happiness and Glory, on the Neglect and Performance of particular Duties, at the same Time, that he does not believe there is any Cause for the one, or Ground for the other? Let such a One consider what is the Hypocrite's Recompense from God? Should any such Ministers urge, we believe, but we do not practise these Things. I am persuaded such a Plea as this would neither lessen their Guilt, nor diminish their Punishment. *The Servant, that knew not his Master's Will, was commanded to be beaten with few Stripes,*

Stripes, whilst he that knew and would not do it, was ordered to be beaten with many Stripes.

But let us attend to the Consequences which flow to our People from such a Conduct, and the Guilt of such Ministers will appear in its proper Magnitude. Instead of saving the Souls of Others, we become the very Instruments to destroy them.

The Complexion of a Parish, where Parishes are small, is frequently borrowed from its Minister. It is sober or drunken, moral or serious, in some considerable Proportion, to the Sobriety or Drunkenness, the decent or serious Behaviour of him that is set over it. If then we prove unfaithful, we not only stand condemned for Crimes committed by ourselves, but we stand, in some Measure, chargeable with the Crimes of our People. Many of their precious Souls might have been everlastingly saved, which perish *for Lack of Knowledge*. We might have been the Instruments of bringing them to Glory. We might have presented them to God, *as Crowns of our Rejoicing in the Day of the Lord Jesus*. Instead of this, they perish, and perish through our Fault. Whatsoever Degree of Blame may fall on them, no little Share will lie at our Door. We have been their Betrayers

and Murtherers. Had we destroyed the Body, that had been accounted a Deed of the blackest Dye amongst Men. But if we have been unfaithful Ministers, we have murdered their Better Part. We have deceived them, and deceived them, perhaps, to their everlasting Ruin. With this then they will confront us in the awful Day of God. For this they will curse us, and curse us for ever, in the Regions of endless Ruin and Despair.

If, indeed, we are such Men, our Consciences may be hardened too much to feel these Things now. But there is an Hour coming, when Conscience will sleep no longer; when the Righteous Judge of the Earth *shall reprove us, and set before us the Things we have done.* When Death approaches, and he will not be long in coming to us all; when the Judgment Seat is set, and our Tryal for Eternity is at Hand; when we can silence the Clamours of Guilt, and mock God no longer; it will then be something to pass our broken Accounts, and answer for our Stewardship: It will be something to see those poor Creatures on the left Hand, whose Souls we have destroyed: It will be something to meet our own deserved Fate, and to be sent away with that Shame, Reproof, and Indignation, which our own accumulated Guilt
hath

hath merited, and something to feel it's Punishment *for ever*.

How widely different will the State and Fate of that Minister be, whose Conscience, and whose Saviour bear Witness for him, that he hath been a faithful Steward of the Mysteries of Heaven, and that he is clear of the Blood of all Men; whose Christian Life and Heavenly Conversation, have afforded an illustrious Example to his People, and who, longing after their Salvation, *hath not shunned to declare unto them the Whole Counsel of God?*

Such a one hath the Happiness to know, *that he hath taken Heed unto himself, and to his Doctrine; that by so doing he might save himself, and those that heard him.* He has Peace in his own Breast; for, as Solomon observes, *the good Man is satisfied from himself;* and this Rejoicing is his—the Testimony of his Conscience, that he hath both *preached the Truth as it is in Jesus;* and also, in *Simplicity and godly Sincerity hath had his Conversation in the World.* And, humanly speaking, he hath Nothing to blame himself for with respect to others. Though many, perhaps, would not be entreated by him, yet he can *call Heaven and Earth to record against them, that he hath often set before them Life and Death, Blessing and Cursing.*

Yea,

Yea, they themselves remember, how *he ceased not, for many Years, to warn them Night and Day, perhaps with Tears.* And in others, God hath been pleased to let him see the Fruit and End of his Labour. Amongst his People are some *Seals to his Ministry*: Some converted by his Instrumentality, who will be *his Joy and Crown of Rejoicing in the Day of the Lord Jesus.* I have no greater Joy, said the Beloved Apostle, *than to hear that my Children walk in the Truth.* Hence, in the most pleasing Sense, *the Blessing of him that was ready to perish, is come upon him.* These dear and precious People, saved by his Ministry, acknowledge him to have been the blessed Instrument, in the Hands of their Redeemer, of *delivering them from Death, and saving their Souls alive*: And consequently, he is entitled to these Promises from approving Heaven:—*If any Man do err, and one convert him, let him know that he who converteth a Sinner from the Error of his Way, shall save a Soul from Death, and shall hide a Multitude of Sins.* And again, *They that be wise shall shine as the Brightness of the Firmament, and they that turn many to Righteousness, as the Stars for ever and ever.*

A Minister of this Sort must surely be more comfortable and happy in this World, than one that is unfaithful; and no one here, I trust, will
question,

question, that their Situations will be widely distant at the Hour of Death, in the Day of Judgment, and through the boundless Ages of Eternity.

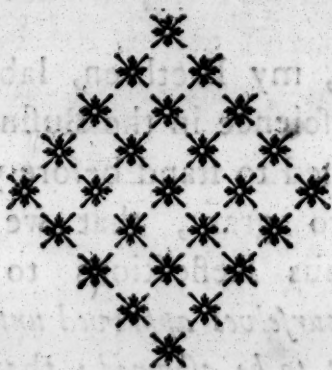
At the Hour of Death, the pious and diligent Minister will look back with Satisfaction, and forward with Delight, because he hath laboured to be faithful to his Lord, and his dear Redeemer will not forsake him in his last Moments. He may smile at Death, because that Serpent is deprived of his Sting, and the Grave hath lost the Victory. At the Day of Judgment he will meet with Transport at the Right Hand of his Redeemer, the precious Souls whom he hath been the means of saving. And in Heaven he will enjoy a rich, a sweet, a glorious Eternity, resting from all his Toils, and possessing the never-fading Crown, bought with his Redeemer's Blood, and given to all, *that fight the good Fight of Faith, and are faithful unto Death.*

Having now, my Brethren, laboured to discharge my Conscience in the Business, on which I have been called to stand before you this Day; I pray God to grant, that we may all lay these momentous Reflections to Heart, and study to *shew ourselves approved unto God, Workmen that need not to be ashamed*: that so, we may
have

have Peace in our own Breasts, be the happy Instruments of saving others, and meet at last the Smiles of approving Heaven, whilst the gracious Judge shall admit us to his Kingdom, with—*Well done, ye good and faithful Servants, enter ye into the Joy of your Lord.*

F I N I S.

*At the End of the first Paragraph in Page 6, for Acts xv. 16. 26.
read Acts xv. xvi. xx.*



R129775

Joseph Harkins
his son Book

Feb. 10 10
Joseph

Hymn Book
L783.9
H877

\$10

[c. 1794]